



# TWO SOLDIERS

A Thrilling Army Romance of the Western Frontier.

By CAPT. CHARLES KING, U. S. A.

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As the big bell on the city hall had struck one, Capt. Lane appeared at the office of Vincent, Clark & Co., and was shown without delay into the private room of the senior partner. Mr. Vincent, looking even older and grayer in the light of the rear of the massive building, was seated at his desk and busily occupied with a book of memoranda and figures. He pushed back his chair and came forward. "At once at sight of Lane, and motioned to the clerk to retire. The clerk's heart was beating harder than he had any recollection of its ever doing before, except in her presence, and he felt that his knees were trembling. But the old gentleman's greeting gave him instant hope: "I am glad you have come, my dear

Mr. Vincent, as he called, almost imploringly, "I cannot tell you how utterly my sympathy is with you in your anxiety and distress. I beg you not to say anything to anyone, but I think it may be in my power to help a little; only it must be a secret between us. She—Mabel must never know."

"Take this chair, captain," he continued, as he returned to his desk. "I have much to say to you," he added, with a sigh. "Let me say at once that from what I know and have heard of you there is no man of my acquaintance to whom I could intrust my daughter's future with more implicit confidence. It is true that both her mother and I had at one time other hopes and views for her, and that we wish your profession was not that of arms. And now I beg you to be patient with me, and to pardon my alluding to matters which you yourself broach in this—this most painful letter. You tell me that you are not dependent on your pay alone, but that from investments in real estate in growing cities in the west and in mines in New Mexico your present income is some five thousand dollars. As I understand you, the property is steadily increasing in value."

"It has steadily increased thus far, sir, and I think it will continue to do so for several years to come—in real estate investments at least."

"I am glad of this, on your account as well as hers, for Mabel has been reared in comparative luxury. She has never known what it was to want anything very much or very long. She has been educated on the supposition that her whole life would be equally free from care or stint; and if I were to die tomorrow, sir, she would be a beggar."

"And here, in great agitation, the old gentleman rose from his chair and began nervously pacing up and down the little room, wringing his white, tremulous hands and turning his face away from the silent soldier that he might not see the tears that hung to the lashes of the piteous quivering of the sensitive lips. For a moment or two nothing more was said. Then, as though in surprise, Mr. Vincent stopped short.

"Did you understand me, Capt. Lane? I do not exaggerate the situation in the least. I do not know how soon the ax will fall. We are safe for today, but know not what the morrow may bring forth. I may be met on my way home by a messenger that the journey is useless, that we are ruined—and the money I hope to get in New York to tide us over would come only too late. Next month at this time the house in which Mabel was born and reared may be sold over her head, with every scrap and atom of its furniture, and we be driven into exile. Do you realize this, sir? Do you understand that if you win her affection and she becomes your wife I have not a penny with which to bless her?"

"Mr. Vincent," answered Lane, "I would hold myself richer than any man in this world if I could know that your daughter cared for me and would be my wife. Do not think that I fail to sympathize and feel for you and all who are dear to you in your distress and anxiety. But I am almost glad to hear that she is not the heiress people said she was. It is Mabel I want—and here his voice trembled almost as much as the old man's, and his honest gray eyes filled up with tears he could not down—and with her for my own I could ask nothing of any man. I have your consent to seek her, then, at once if need be. You know I am relieved from duty here and must rejoin my regiment within ten days."

"My full consent, and my best wishes, captain," said Mr. Vincent, grasping the outstretched hand in both his own. "You have not spoken to her at all?"

"Not a word, Mr. Vincent; and I can form no idea what her answer will be. Pardon me, sir, but she or has Mrs. Vincent any knowledge of your business troubles?"

"My wife knows, of course, that everything is going wrong and that I am desperately harassed; Mabel, too, knows that I have lost much money—very much—in the last two years; but neither of them knows the real truth—that even my life insurance is gone. A year ago I strove to obtain additional amounts in the three companies in which I had taken out policies years ago. Of course a rigid examination had to be made by the medical advisers, and the result was the total rejection of my applications, and in two cases an offer to return with interest the premiums hitherto paid. The physicians had also discovered serious trouble with my heart. Last winter our business was at its lowest ebb. I had been fortunate in some speculations on change in the past, and I strove to restore our failing fortunes in that way. My margins were swept away like chaff, and I have been vainly striving to regain them for the last three months, until now the last cent that I could raise is waiting the result of this week's deal. Every man in all the great markets east and west knew three weeks ago that a powerful and wealthy syndicate had 'cornered' the wheat, and was forcing the price up day by day; and I had started in on the wrong side. Even if the corner were to break to-morrow I could not recover half my losses. The offer the insurance companies made was eagerly accepted, sir; I took their money, and it dribbled away through my broker's fingers. If wheat goes up one cent, we cannot meet our

obligations—we are gone. We have been compelled to borrow at ruinous rates in order to meet our calls; I say we, for poor Clark is with me in the deal, and it means ruin for him too, though he, luckily, has neither wife nor child. Are you ready, sir, to ally your name with that of a ruined and broken man—to wed a beggar's daughter?" And here poor old Vincent fairly broke down and sobbed aloud. Long watching, sleepless nights, suspense, wretched anxiety, the averted looks and whispered comments of the men he daily met on change, the increasing brusqueness and insolence of his broker, Warden—all had combined to shake and quiver with grief. The sight was too much for Lane. This was her father; it was her home that was threatened, her name that was in jeopardy.

"Mr. Vincent," he cried, almost imploringly, "I cannot tell you how utterly my sympathy is with you in your anxiety and distress. I beg you not to say anything to anyone, but I think it may be in my power to help a little; only it must be a secret between us. She—Mabel must never know."

CHAPTER VI.



Miss Mabel says please excuse pencil, etc.

In the three days that followed the transfer of funds and property at the rendezvous took place, and Mr. Noel stepped in, vice Lane, relieved and ordered to join his regiment. The former was having a delightful time. A guest of the wealthy Withers could not long be a stranger within their gates to the Queen citizens, and every afternoon and evening found him enjoying hospitalities of the most cordial character. At the club he had already become half-fellow with all the younger element, and had made himself decidedly popular among the elders, and every man who had not met that jolly Capt. Noel was eager to be presented to him. He was ready for pool, billiards, bowling or a drink the moment he got within the stable doorway; and, as he sang, whistled, laughed, chatted and cracked innumerable jokes during the various games, was a capital mimic, and could personate Pat, Hans or Crapaud with telling effect, his presence was pronounced by every one as better than a solid week of sunshine—something the Queen City rarely, if ever, experienced.

Poor Lane, on the contrary, was nearly worrying his heart out. He had gone to the Vincents' the very evening on which he had seen the father of the family off for New York, and had served himself to put his fortune to the test—to tell her of his deep and devoted love and to ask her to be his wife. That she well knew he loved her, without being told, he felt sure must be the case; but, beyond a belief that she liked and trusted him, the captain had not the faintest idea as to the nature of her feelings towards him. He was a modest fellow, as has been said. His glass told him that, despite a pair of clear gray eyes and a decidedly soldierly cut to his features, he was not what women called a handsome man; and, what was more, there were little strands of gray just beginning to show about his broad forehead and in the heavy mustache that shaded his mouth. Lane sighed as he remembered that he was in his 38th year. How could she care for him—fifteen years her senior? Lane rang the door bell that night and felt once more that his heart was beating even as it did at 1 o'clock when he was ushered into the awful presence of her father.

"Miss Vincent has not left her room today, and is not well enough to come down to-night, sir," said the servant who came to the door, "and Mrs. Vincent begged to be excused because of Miss Mabel's needful her."

"I am very, very sorry," stammered the captain. "Please say that Mr. Lane called (they had known him so well for two months as Mr. Lane that he could not yet refer to himself by his new title), and—and would call again to-morrow, hoping to hear Miss Vincent was much better."

And when he got back to the house the light was still burning in the window in the second story, and the doctor had just left, said the sympathetic Abigail, and had said it was nothing serious or alarming; Miss Mabel would have to keep quiet a day or two; that was all.

But what hard luck for poor Lane, when the days of his stay were so very few! All Thursday morning was spent at the rendezvous, counting over property and comparing papers with Noel. Then, while that gentleman went to the club for luncheon the captain hastened to the Vincents' door to renew intimacies and was measurably comforted by the news that Miss Mabel was much better, though still confined to her room. Would he not come in? Mrs. Vincent was out, but she thought—did that most intelligent young woman, Mary Anne, that perhaps there was a message for him. Like Mr. Toots, poor Lane, in his anxiety to put no one to any trouble, came within an ace of stammering: "It's of no consequence," but checked himself in time, and stepped into the bright parlor in which he had spent so many delicious hours listening to her soft, rich voice as she sang, or as she chatted blithely with him and her frequent guests. It was some time before Mary Anne returned. Evidently, there was a message, for the girl's face was dimpled with smiles as she handed him a little note. "Miss Mabel says please excuse pencil, sir; she had to be writing down. Miss Holton has just gone away, after spending most of the morning."

Excuse pencil! Lane could hardly wait to read the precious lines. How he longed to give the girl a five dollar bill! But this wasn't England, and he did not know how Mary Anne would regard such a proffer. She promptly and discreetly retired, leaving the front door open for his exit, and the sweet June sunshine and the soft warm breath of early summer flowing in through the broad vestibule.

"How good you are to me!" she wrote. "The flowers were—and are still—exquisite. I shall be down at a little while to-morrow afternoon, if the doctor is good to me as you are. Then I can thank you, can I not? M. L. V."

The hours dragged until Friday afternoon came. He had to go to the Vincents' to dinner on Thursday evening, and a dreary, ostentatious, ponderous feast it was. Noel, in his full dress uniform, was the hero of the hour. He greeted Lane a trifle nervously. "I meant to have telephoned and begged you to bear me out, old man," said he, "but this thing was sprung on me after I got home. Cousin Mattie simply ordered me to appear in my war paint, and I had to do it. You are to go in to dinner with her by the way; and wish you were on grand parade instead of civilian spike tail. Here's Ames."

And Ames marched him around to one guest after another—"Well, money makers, with their over-dressed wives. Lane strove hard to be entertaining to his hostess, but that lady's mind was totally engrossed in the progress of the feast and dread of possible catastrophe to style or service. Her eyes glanced nervously from her husband to the butler and his assistants, and her lips perpetually formed inaudible instructions or warnings, and so, happily, the evening passed without incident. That a good deal with a slight, dark-eyed and decidedly intelligent girl who sat to his right, and who was totally ignored by the young cub who took her in—the eldest son of the house of Withers, a callow youth of 20.

"You did not hear my name, I know," she said to him. "I am Miss Marshall, a very distant connection of Mrs. Withers, the teacher of her younger children, and the merest kind of an accident at this table. Miss Faulkner was compelled to send her excuses at the last moment, and so I was detailed—in that your soldier expression—to fill the gap."

"And where did you learn our army expressions, may I ask?" said Lane smilingly.

"I had a cousin in the artillery some years ago, and visited his wife when they were stationed at the old barracks across the river. There's no one there now, I believe. Listen to Captain Noel: he is telling about Indian campaigns."

Indeed, pretty much everybody was listening already, for Noel, with much admiration, was recounting the experiences of the chase after the Chiricahua chieftain, Geronimo. He was an excellent teller, and his descriptions were so graphic, and yet the impression conveyed—and intended to be conveyed—was that no man had seen more, endured more or ridden harder, faster and further, than the narrator. Flattered by the evident interest shown by those about him, and noting that conversation was brisk at Lane's end of the table, the lieutenant soon lost himself in the enthusiasm of his own descriptions, and was only suddenly recalled to earth by noting that now the whole table had ceased its dinner chat, and that, with the possible exception of the hostess, who was telegraphing signals to the butler, every man and woman present was looking at him and listening. The color leaped to his face, and he turned towards Lane with a nervous laugh.

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Appointment Book for dates of sales will be found at Brillhart & Pile's, on Broadway, where all desiring his services may leave notice. Postoffice address—Abilene, Kas. 31-ly

ABSTRACTS

Made for all lands and lots in Dickinson County, at

REASONABLE RATES.

HILAND SOUTHWORTH,

Abilene, Kas.

THE

Abilene National Bank

Cash Capital, \$150,000.

C. H. BARKER, President

W. D. RICE, Vice President

E. D. HUMPHREY, Cashier

TRANSACTS A

GENERAL BANKING BUSINESS

THOMAS KIRBY,

BANKER,

ABILENE, KANSAS.

Transacts a

GENERAL BANKING BUSINESS

Gives special attention to Collections, buys and sells Foreign and Domestic Exchange.

Negotiates Mortgage Loans.

All business promptly attended to.

MONEY TO LOAN!

You will find my office

ON BUCKEYE AVENUE,

Just East of the U. P. Depot, Abilene,

And I take pleasure in saying that I can give you as

Good Terms and Rates of Interest

As any other Agent in the state. You can get your money soon as the papers are signed, and conditioned that you

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Of the principal and no expense in transmuting either your interest or principal.

I Am Here to Stay!

J. C. BENDER